

# Glocality and Cosmopolitanism in European Crime Narratives

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This introduction presents some of the research conducted in the frame of "DETECT. Detecting Transcultural Identity in European Popular Crime Narratives", a project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 770151.

## Abstract

As an introduction to this issue of Academic Quarter, the article offers a few reflections on how the notions of glocalism and cosmopolitanism can help frame the transcultural significance of one of the most popular narrative genres of the last decades – crime fiction. Stemming in part from the research conducted in the frame of the European Union's Horizon 2020 DETECT project, the articles in this issue explore whether or not European crime fiction, in its different literary, audio-visual and transmedia manifestations, has been contributing to shape a cosmopolitan culture across the continent. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the European crime genre has increasingly exploited the diversity of European cultures and landscapes to create engaging narratives able to travel transnationally. In so doing, it has become one of the clearest examples of today's glocal culture, but the question remains of whether its celebration of local singularities on a global scale has concretely promoted the generation of cosmopolitan identities able to transcend the barriers that national and linguistic boundaries keep maintaining between different countries and communities.

**Keywords:** European crime fiction, glocalism, cosmopolitanism, transmediality, Mediterranean Noir

This special issue stems from the research conducted in the frame of *DETECT: Detecting Transcultural Identity in European Popular Crime Narratives*, a project funded by the EU Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme between 2018 and 2021 ([www.detect-project.eu](http://www.detect-project.eu)). DETECT explores whether and how the products of contemporary European popular culture – particularly within the crime genre – can possibly contribute to shape what we call a transcultural identity, or rather a set of transcultural identities able to transcend the barriers that national and linguistic boundaries keep maintaining between different countries and communities. The project looks at the contemporary period, and especially at the decades following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, taken as a conventional date for the onset of the process of European integration – and, more broadly, globalization. The crucial changes precipitated by the fall of the wall in the political and economic organization of Western societies went hand in hand with the emergence of new

transcultural forms of representation, stimulating the appearance of stories, figures and voices revolving around new social, gender and ethnic subject positions that do not conform to or challenge rigid cultural identities. While the special issue also presents welcome contributions from scholars who do not participate in the project, many papers and this Introduction were penned by DETECT members, giving us the opportunity to showcase part of the work so far completed in the frame of the project.

We believe that the themes, the objects of study and the approaches addressed by DETECT can be of great interest for a larger scholarly community as well as for the general public. The problem of cultural identity – and, specifically, of European identity – is indeed of extreme urgency. Social and political conflicts around this issue affect the everyday lives of European citizens with a growing dramatic impact. Frictions and resentments between individuals and communities with different cultural backgrounds, ideological and material struggles around the destiny of migrants in our societies, economic and geopolitical tensions between different countries and regions across Europe have become increasingly visible during the last decade, leading scholars, commentators and society at large to conduct a profound questioning of the project of European integration, as well as, more broadly, of the process of globalization itself.

Popular media narratives, and cross- and transmedia crime fiction in particular, have not only been privileged observers of these phenomena but also prominent vehicles of their development and international spread, in Europe as elsewhere (Bondebjerg et al. 2015). If we focus on the field of crime fiction – this quintessential product of the European and global media industries – it is indeed easy to notice how much it has actively participated in these processes, sometimes closely following larger trends, other times anticipating or shaping some distinctive aspects of the forms, the themes and the modes of production, distribution, and consumption of contemporary popular culture (Turnbull 2014). From the regionalization of crime narratives (Levet 2020) to their increasing cultural legitimization (Collovald and Neveu 2013), from the growing international visibility of local and national products (Hansen et al. 2018) to the emergence of transnational forms and formats (Hansen et al. 2018), the genre's contemporary developments offer

themselves as ideal opportunities to both investigate DETECT's research questions about European cultural identity and mobilize the theoretical framework deployed through the project.

While the space limits of this special issue will allow to only touch upon a few of the themes and approaches explored in DETECT, the two keywords included in the title of this issue highlight two crucial features of contemporary crime fiction. The articles in this publication explore how and why the concepts of *glocality* (Roudometof 2016) and *cosmopolitanism* (Beck 2006), which have inspired the research agendas of many a contemporary approach to European literature (Domínguez & d'Haen 2015), film (Eleftheriotis 2012; Mulvey, Rascaroli, Saldanha 2017) and television (Chalaby 2009; Bondebjerg 2016), can be applied to gain interesting insights in the (trans)cultural significance of contemporary European crime fiction.

### **From glocal crime narratives...**

This issue investigates the ways in which European crime narratives represent European landscapes and social realities to showcase the great geographical, social and cultural diversity that characterizes the continent. It is apparent that, in the last few decades, crime fiction has been one of the genres that have most often been used as lenses to observe, and a means to negotiate, the tensions, fears and hopes of our time as experienced in specific social-cultural contexts, while framing them through the intrinsically international form provided by the genre's conventions. In Europe as elsewhere, the trend of 'regional' crime fiction has indeed characterized a surprising number of recent crime novels, films and TV dramas. Leaving behind the metropolitan atmosphere – very much associated with the image of such modern world cities as London, Paris or New York – that had distinguished classical detective and gangster stories for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, contemporary crime narratives have been decidedly shifting their interest towards peripheral, marginal and remote settings, thus representing parts of Europe and other world regions which used to be largely forgotten by either mainstream popular culture and traditional crime fiction.

It is no coincidence that David Damrosch, one of the main proponents of the notion of glocalism in the field of literature (Damrosch 2009), is also one of the editors of an important collection of essays, *Crime Fiction as World Literature* (2017), which highlights the multi-

ple ways in which the genre has been used, and critically analysed, to explore provincial, rural and oft-forgotten areas. In this respect, the crucial feature of the genre proves to be the flexibility of its narrative structures, which can serve a double purpose (Weissmann 2018). On the one hand, crime narratives are used to attract the attention of an international audience on some characteristic features of a specific local community. On the other hand, they help creatives convey a content explicitly conceived for domestic, and even local audiences through international generic forms and formats, so as to allow the inhabitants of particular regions or countries to recognize themselves, their habitats and cultures in products that adopt global patterns of representation.

As a result of this trend, crime fiction has started to focus more and more on the representation of spaces where the threshold between geographical and cultural barriers is constantly trespassed, and where local, regional, and national identities keep superimposing one onto another. As happened with other narrative genres in recent years, the crime genre has given increasing attention to the physical and political geography of borders, with a growing number of stories revolving around the vicissitudes of individuals and groups moving across frontiers. In this way, crime narratives have lent themselves to be used as critical lens to investigate the diversity, contradictions as well as, often, utterly controversial aspects of contemporary European society. Interestingly enough, this emphasis on regionalism is also entirely in line with an almost opposite objective, as proved by the fact that localised narratives have been increasingly used in planning and developing touristic strategies aimed to promote the areas in which they are set. This might not come as a surprise to the connoisseur of detective fiction, as all the classics of the genre have been closely associated to specific spaces and places: from Holmes's London to Marlowe's Los Angeles, from Poirot's British countryside to Maigret's Paris. Contemporary crime narratives, however, build on this well-established generic bond to space to divert the audience's gaze to a varied set of new potential destinations, shedding light on places as diverse as the Sicily of the Commissioner Montalbano and the Stockholm of Lisbeth Salander, from the Marseille of Fabio Montale to the Edinburgh of John Rebus, from the Athens of Kostas Charitos to the Ystad of Kurt Wallander, and even as far as the new polar settings of Arctic Noir.

The counter cultural influences on many of these series and their direct links with a leftist critique of late capitalism, however, are still clearly evident in much of the new 'glocalised' context, as this kind of narratives are perfectly suited to explore the social and political problems faced by the inhabitants of specific territories as well as to narrativize the really global impact of the environmental crisis (as testified by the emergence of the 'eco-thriller' subgenre). Even the apparently neutral category of 'Mediterranean Noir', first introduced in the 1990s by Jean-Claude Izzo, was coined with an explicit, very specific polemical goal: that of questioning the simplistic association of Marseille – Izzo's hometown and one of the main subjects of his novels – to a homogenized notion of European culture, which threatens to dissolve the multiple ethnic, linguistic and cultural influences behind the identity of not only this particular city but also Mediterranean societies at large (Izzo 2006). The widening role of language and ethnic minorities is indeed another key element in recent European crime narratives and has become a powerful tool to explore and question a number of stereotypes that have traditionally been reinforced by the products of popular culture – for instance by the countless detective stories in which marginal groups, migrant communities or foreign powers were represented in the role of criminals and villains.

To look at popular narratives from the prism of glocality might thus lead us to think that the motto of the European Union – "Unity in diversity" – corresponds to a visible reality, as crime fiction from across the continent shows a stunning mixture of a variety of local, national and international cultures interacting with one another through the common language of the genre. At the same time, all the ambiguity and possible shortcuts of a simplistic reading of the European integration process become all the more visible when looking more closely at this peculiar cultural production. To further investigate the riddle of European identity, this special issue engages with another central concept in contemporary cultural and social studies: cosmopolitanism. As many authors have suggested, contemporary articulations of cosmopolitanism are largely shaped by practices of aesthetic consumption, such as culinary choices, listening to music, reading fiction or watching TV. According to Beck (2006), all these unremarkable everyday practices participate in moulding a type of "banal cosmopolitanism" productive of new so-



cial identities that thrive in the consumption of differences. And yet, we cannot help asking whether the transnational cultural encounters undeniably enabled by popular media do actually give shape to a transcultural space truly accessible to all Europeans, or whether they don't also highlight the widening gap existing between the cosmopolitan ethos expressed by the professionals of the creative industries and the strong attachments to traditional identities that is still very much alive in large sectors of European society.

### **...to cosmopolitan crime fiction?**

The new global configuration of the world's geography – imposed by such powerful systemic factors as transnational trade, connective technologies, and the movement of large masses of people across different boundaries – have fuelled a variegated debate over the transcultural potential, or cosmopolitan nature, of contemporary culture. Developing their reflections in a post-national, post-colonial analytical framework (Mellino 2005), scholars have proposed new approaches to account for both the positive and the negative aspects of an increasingly hybrid world, such as “critical transculturalism” (Kraidy 2005) and “critical cosmopolitanism” (Delanty 2006; Rumford 2008). As our brief discussion of glocalism already suggested, the representation of particular local/national spaces and cultures in popular print and screen fiction can also be usefully regarded through concepts like “translocality” (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013, Hansen and Waade 2017), transnational mobility and cosmopolitan networking, which help understand how place-specific production cultures and genre-specific approaches typical of contemporary crime narratives are affected by the cosmopolitan attitude of both their authors and their audiences.

In this special issue we refer to the notion of cosmopolitanism to indicate “an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences” (Hannerz, cit. In Roudometof 2005, 114). It is important to emphasize the difference between this concept and the idea of transnationalism, which has a more clearly defined political and economic inflection. Indeed, our goal is not so much to investigate the forms that transnational exchange takes up in fields like cultural trade and communication, but rather to explore the impact of these processes on people's behaviours, atti-

tudes and cultural identities. As Victor Roudometof observes, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism should not be confused: while the former is undoubtedly facilitated by the latter, there is no guarantee that the subjects involved in transnational processes (such as, for example, migrants, refugees, or international students) would develop a cosmopolitan approach (Roudometof 2005, 117).

The peculiar cosmopolitan sensibility of crime fiction can be examined from many different perspectives. First of all, narrative consumption can be regarded as a form of virtual travelling, an immersion in a distant reality which transports the reader/viewer farther away from their everyday experiences (Bondebjerg et al. 2015). Regional crime fiction is again a perfect case in point: not only are the products of Nordic and Mediterranean Noir enjoyed as a sort of comfortable, entertaining introduction to the landscapes and customs of some more or less exotic culture, but, as already noticed, they also contribute to support physical tourism, inspiring both official and unofficial tours to the locations represented in the stories (Hanse and Waade, 2017).

A second, important way through which crime novels, films and TV dramas participate in the spreading of a cosmopolitan ethos is by confronting its audiences with the portrayal of transcultural social contexts. More and more often, writers and screenwriters depict detectives and criminals as the representatives of a society comprising an increasingly diverse mixture of cultural identities, and they regularly structure their plots around current conflicts arising from the clash between individuals from seemingly incompatible communities. Also in this specific respect, the features and the very success of Nordic Noir indicate a model for this approach: on the one hand, writers and screenwriters use their characters to vehicle an inclusive vision, emphasizing the opportunities for mutual understanding between individuals and communities; on the other hand, the criminal and investigative activities at the centre of the narrative often translate in fictional form the perceived dangers haunting Western liberal democracies and, particularly, the struggling social-democracies of Northern Europe. The quick and widespread influence of this sub-genre across the continent is a blatant effect of its 'cosmopolitanism', affording non-Scandinavian creators the opportunity to appropriate the Nordic imagery and narrative style to renew the representation of their own countries and regions



through a somewhat exoticizing lens (the curious and symptomatic case of 'Hungarian Nordic Noir' is examined in Kalai and Keszeg's article included in this issue – see also below).

Thirdly, the genre as a whole strongly participates in the broader process of transformation of the ways in which new social and cultural identities are represented in contemporary popular culture, through the portrayal of characters of mixed background and shifting personalities, moving between physical spaces as much as between mental boundaries, traversing sexual, gender, ethnic and national identities (Christian 2001; Anderson 2012).

Fourthly, and perhaps more visibly, the cosmopolitanism of crime fiction appears on the level of its modes of production. Here, a number of crucial research questions could be asked: which are the industrial players and the production strategies that are put in place to facilitate the creation of works able to travel across different countries? What is the social and cultural background of the authors and producers behind these creations? Are these 'cosmopolitan' narratives designed to simply replicate established models – already appreciated by specific niche audiences, namely the educated, urban middle class – to the effect of simply reinforcing the comfortable liberal attitudes of the most culturally influential audiences and, therefore, widening their distance from the rest of the population? Or are these individual and collective subjects capable of giving an accurate representation of society, including its many, 'not-so cosmopolitan' sectors?

In summary, by combining the perspective of glocality and the issue of cosmopolitanism, this special issue aims to highlight the contradictions at the core of the process of European cultural integration from the vantage point of popular media culture. The glocal and cosmopolitan features of European crime fiction which will be examined in this issue cannot be conceived of as simply unifying factors, fostering the generation of a single, shared and uniform transnational identity, but rather, they must be approached as signs that speak of a whole variety of European transcultural identities, expressed in different writing and audio-visual styles, characteristic narrative models, and place-specific production cultures. In fact, a proper dialectics can be seen at work here, where the process of hybridization and transculturation appears as much a driver of cultural homologation as a vehicle for a growing differentiation of nar-

rative forms and styles, content and formats. Whether this process will contribute to the emergence of a post-national assemblage of multiple cosmopolitan identities remains uncertain at the moment, but still it is all too apparent how deeply these phenomena are affecting and renewing traditional European culture(s).

### The articles

The articles in this issue elaborate on the relationship between glocality and cosmopolitanism from different perspectives, looking at largely different corpora and individual case studies.

The first two articles address some of the structural features in the transnational circulation of European crime narratives. Jacques Migozzi – a member of the DETECT consortium – adopts the perspective of distant reading to look at the circulation of crime narratives in the field of literature. By analysing the translations of a significant corpus of European crime novels through quantitative methods, Migozzi describes the increasing importance acquired by non-American or British crime novels in the European market, providing detailed figures and analyses that show how the number of authors and works that have been successfully translated in other European languages has grown significantly during the last 15 or 20 years. While focusing on the role of translation in the publishing market, the article touches on key aspects in the circulation of popular narratives in Europe, highlighting how trespassing linguistic barriers is a necessary precondition for a true cultural integration.

Sándor Kalai and Anna Keszeg – also members of the DETECT consortium – adopt a rather different perspective to discuss a more specific example of cultural adaptation. Their contribution looks at recent Hungarian crime narratives to reconstruct the interesting (if belated) reception and appropriation of Nordic Noir in the country. The scholars take into consideration the influence of Scandinavian crime fiction on the production and marketing of a small corpus of Hungarian novels, films and television series moulded on the successful North-European model. Kalai and Keszeg therefore engage with the crucial dialectics at the core of the process explored in this special issue: the tension between the risks and affordances implied in the adoption of cosmopolitan forms, namely cultural homogenization and cultural diversification. The case of 'Hungarian Nordic Noir' shows not only the limitations, but also the potential of this

encounter between East and West, proving the ability of local creative industries to rework in original ways (including the use of parody) the models proposed by Western popular culture.

The following two articles look at glocalism and cosmopolitanism in relation to the production strategies of crime TV dramas. The topic is crucial for the DETECT project (see the report *Location marketing and cultural tourism*): crime TV dramas provide some of the best examples of how the process of glocalization and the related emergence of a cosmopolitan aesthetics has stimulated a quick increase in the number of European series engaging with the modes of production, narrative strategies and stylistic trends of international television, striving much more often than in the past to reach a continental audience, and beyond. In their articles, Massimiliano Coviello and Valentina Re – also members of the DETECT consortium – and Lothar Mikos examine two different ways in which specific spaces play a key role in both the production and representation strategies of crime TV dramas. Coviello and Re look at the increasing relevance of peripheral locations in Italian television. By analysing in particular the production, marketing and reception of the RAI show *La porta Rossa* (Rai 2, 2017-), the two scholars show in detail how the choice of a specific location – the border town of Trieste, in the north-east of Italy – modified the screenwriters' original idea and led to other unexpected choices. The series is a telling example of how the choice of locations can be profoundly affected by industrial strategies and policy regulations, but also strongly contribute to the final narrative and stylistic outcome.

Lothar Mikos examines the cosmopolitan attitude that characterizes contemporary TV series production in Berlin. He argues that cosmopolitanism can be seen as the result of a media industry “in which not only films and television series are traded globally, but in which talent mobility and a global openness to cultural products from all regions of the world are continually on the rise.” In this context, a crucial role in the propagation of a cosmopolitan style of contemporary crime TV dramas is played by the common aesthetic orientations that guide the choices of television buyers from everywhere in the world in the global market of television production.

The following group of three articles decisively shift the focus on the issue of representation, looking at a set of case studies from different countries and different media. Livio Lepratto's paper looks at

the multifaced, always changing representation of Rome, its different areas and suburbs in a corpus of Italian crime productions from over the last decade. The complex image of the Italian capital city has been at the centre of recent novels, films and TV series, including the screen adaptations of Giancarlo De Cataldo's bestseller novels, *Romanzo criminale* and *Suburra*. In recent years, these works, together with other examples of crime fiction from Italy, particularly the *Gomorra* franchise, have reached an international success rarely obtained before by Italian media industries, proving that the exploration of specific localities can effectively contribute to the appeal of European creative works.

Alice Jacquelin – another member of the DETECT consortium – compares and contrasts a group of novels by two French writers, Colin Niel and Antonin Varenne, who are often referred to as the heirs of French *néo-polar* as well as part of the more recent trend of 'ethnopolar.' Jacquelin focuses in particular on the way in which marginalized communities within metropolitan France and in overseas territories are represented in these novels to raise questions about French identity and national borders, highlighting the authors' different approaches to the environmental issues they put in the foreground. Despite these differences, the article emphasises how both Niel and Varenne use the crime genre as a tool to explore new territories and underrepresented social realities, with the clear objective to develop a powerful social critique very much in line with Jean-Patrick Manchette's description of crime fiction, and specifically noir, as "the great moralist literature of our times."

Kaisa Hiltunen's article looks at how the use of Lapland as the setting for the Finnish-German TV series *Ivalo* (Elisa Viihde/Yle, 2018-) engages with the category of Nordic Noir and, more specifically, 'Arctic Noir', in order to offer the viewer an original border narrative and careful investigation of the relationship between Lapish and Finnish identities. Interestingly, the series' plot also seems to forebode the COVID-19 pandemic, portraying the spread of a life-threatening "Yemenite virus" developed as a biological weapon from the Balkans to Lapland, thus adding a further element that simultaneously alludes to the breaking down of national boundaries and the rise of new conflicts between countries.

The last three articles look more specifically at the multiple consequences that the adoption of a glocal and/or cosmopolitan sensi-

bility produces in the critical representation of gender, national and migrant identities. Lynge Stegger Gemzøe – a member of the DETECT consortium – discusses one of the most acclaimed recent European TV dramas, *Killing Eve* (BBC America, 2018-), pointing to the series' many original features, from its representation of female (anti)heroic, and, particularly, villainous figures, to its (self)ironic use of stereotypes of European culture(s). Gemzøe's article highlights both the strengths and a few shortcuts of the series in these respects, which appear in any case a symptomatic example of current developments in European crime drama.

Jamie Nicholas Steele, on the other hand, goes back to a more classic example of contemporary European auteur cinema looking at a film of the Dardenne brothers – *La fille inconnue* (2016) – to analyse its engagement with the themes and forms of European noir. Steele emphasises that the unusual combination of the Dardenne's distinctive style and poetics with the conventions of the crime genre finds a host of creative, and perhaps unexpected, opportunities precisely in a field that is presently most often associated with mainstream TV seriality. The film's attention to the *bas-fonds* of a Belgian provincial town (Liège) and its critical exploration of the migrants' and refugees' experiences in the Western world emerges a perfect example of how the crime genre can be effectively used to address urgent social and political matters.

Finally, Caius Dobrescu – also member of the DETECT consortium – critically examines the outcome of an American production set in Eastern Europe as a sort of cautionary tale for our continental production. His analysis of *Comrade Detective* (Amazon Prime Video, 2017) consequently works as a most appropriate conclusion to this special issue. The series is an attempt at portraying the life in the Eastern Block from an ironic, yet sympathetic perspective – a parodic re-creation of a detective story set and produced in 1980s Romania. Dobrescu points out the inadequacy of this attempt, which in his view is only partially due to the series' misrepresentation of its subject that actually bears no connection to the actual experience of the Romanian people during the last years of the Ceaușescu's regime. In fact, according to Dobrescu, the series undermines its own effort to create a real connection between the world it depicts and its Western viewers particularly because of its choice of dubbing all of the Eastern characters with the voices of famous Holly-

wood actors and actresses. In this way, he argues, the Eastern characters are turned into simplistic caricatures that do nothing but reinforce well-established stereotypes. European creatives and producers, Dobrescu writes, could learn a valuable lesson from the show's infelicitous outcome: "The problem with Europe's East-West cohesion lies with the solution of the moral conundrum of bringing together a prosperous West that tends to go beyond itself in the Faustian quest for owing everything, of exercising an unlimited and arbitrary authority, and a destitute East whose hubris is the desperate attempt to escape the overload of its indigence and subalternity." While "the example of *Comrade Detective* shows that, in and by themselves, strategies of parody and satire are powerless in front of such a tremendous challenge," the analysis of its failure indicates that a more intelligent use of the crime genre's conventions should rather be aimed to project on a global scale the European "model of productive transgression of narrowly defined cultural identities." From this perspective, Euro Noir should work to become, rather than a stockpile of stereotypes and clichés, a welcome opportunity for a "de-mock-crazy."

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